SPORTS

Winchester volleyball drops first match of the year against non-league Newton North

JOE MCCONNELL | SPORTS EDITOR

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The Winchester High School 2025 volleyball captains of Gwen Gaiko, Johanna Melhorn, Julia Campo and Nora Harstad, from left, were honored prior to the Oct. 20 Woburn match. They have been extraordinary leaders, while guiding their teammates to an 18-1 overall record and a Top 10 statewide ranking in Division 1. COURTESY PHOTO/WINCHESTER HIGH SCHOOL

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Sometimes a regular season loss is a good thing for any team that has state championship aspirations, especially against a club that more than likely they will be seeing down the road deep into the playoffs.

The Winchester High School volleyball team (18-1) is facing that situation head-on right now after non-league host Newton North (15-2) spoiled its attempt for a perfect season last Friday night (Oct. 17).

The Tigers, currently the second seed in the Division 1 power rankings, according to the Oct. 21 statewide poll, won that match, 3-1. In that same poll, the Red & Black are ranked seventh, and probably now have a better understanding on what they might have to do to reverse that score if they get the chance for redemption in November. They can learn a lot more about themselves from a loss against a club that is better than them in the standings, and the second time around might render different results.

In that Newton North matchup, Hazel Lovins led the Winchester offense in kills with 13. Maddie Crooks and Johanna Melhorn each had eight, while Defne Mergen collected 28 assists.

Coach John Fleming, like everybody else, hopes this loss is a learning experience.

“We are naturally disappointed with the loss against Newton North, but we also learned a lot about ourselves in the process,” he said. “We never want to lose a (match), but it did give us some areas to really focus on in preparation for the state tournament.

“Newton North is a great team, led by the reigning player of the year in the state, so we knew it would be a great matchup, and it was,” the Winchester veteran coach added. “After a slow start, we played much better, and know we can also play even better than that (in the future).”

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But the Red & Black ended up having no residual affect from that loss, when they bounced back with a shutout win over visiting Woburn at the McCall Middle School, 3-0 on Senior Night, Oct. 20.

“Beating a league rival on Senior Night is always a good thing,” said Fleming. “It was great to celebrate our four seniors – Julia Campo, Gwen Gaiko, Nora Harstad and Johanna Melhorn – because they have done a great job all year long leading by example. (The younger players) in the program have had four tremendous role models to look up to and aspire to be like, (when it’s their turn to start in the future).”

Lovins was unstoppable on the attack with 19 kills against the Tanners.

“Hitting .750 (percentage) with that many kills is incredible,” said Fleming. “I thought Kaiyal (Kumaran) passed really well, and made some good reads against their hitters, and Johanna (Melhorn) was very disruptive in the front row, coming with four blocks.”

Against the Red Devils in Burlington last week on Oct. 16, the Red & Black were able to record their 14th shutout victory of the year, 3-0.

“I thought Bella (Comes) did such a great job during this match as a setter,” said Fleming. “She was able to set the tone with some tough serves (4 aces), while also doing a nice job in distributing the ball to her hitters.”

Lovins (18 kills), Crooks (9) and Melhorn (8) kept Burlington on the defensive with some solid slams over the net.

Prior to this triumph, the Winchester girls opened last week with results against Arlington at the McCall Middle School on Oct. 14.

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Fleming's team served very well against the Spy Ponders, led by Mergen with five aces, followed by Crooks (4) and Harstad (3). Liv Thompson, Comes and Lovins each chipped in with a pair.

Fleming specifically pointed out after the Arlington match that Harstad played quite well once again to lead her teammates to another Middlesex League win.

After beating host Reading on Oct. 22, 3-0, the Red & Black wrapped up the regular season the next night at home against Belmont. They are now waiting for the state tournament pairings to be announced, and with the regular season cutoff date set for Sunday, Oct. 26, that probable date just might be on Monday, Oct. 27.

Joe McConnell is a longtime, award-winning sports editor for numerous North Shore publications. He began covering Winchester sports for the News last November.

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Winchester boys basketball heads to Bridgewater-Raynham for Sweet 16 game after beating Lexington in postseason opener

It was the third meeting this year between Middlesex League boys basketball rivals Lexington (16-5, 11th seed) and Winchester (17-4, 22nd seed). They split the first two during the regular season, thus making this Round of 32 postseason matchup the impromptu rubber game of this year's series, with the

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Winchester wrestling enjoys Top 10 finish at state divisional meet; senior captains move on to All-States

After the Winchester High qualified wrestlers competed hard over two days last weekend (Feb. 20, 21) in the State Division 1 Meet at North Andover High School, Mother Nature gave them a break to rest and recuperate with Monday's blizzard that resulted in two days off from school. There

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The Winchester High boys hockey team (12-9-2), the 17th seed, edged the 16th-seeded Wachusett Regional Mountaineers (18-2-1), 5-4 in a Round of 32 Division 1 state tournament game at Westborough's Northstar Ice Arena on Feb. 25. The Red & Black will now take on top seed Catholic Memorial (18-2-1)

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The Winchester High boys basketball team, the 22nd seed, will take on Middlesex League rival Lexington, the 11th seed, to begin the Division 1 state tournament in the Round of 32 on Friday night, Feb. 27, starting at 6 p.m. These teams are so evenly matched, beginning with the

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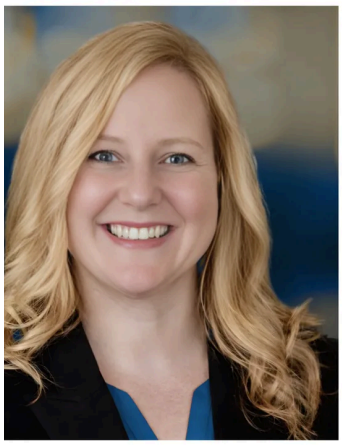

NEWS

Winchester School Committee candidates bring contrasting backgrounds to Thursday forum

Two candidates for Winchester's School Committee will face voters at a forum as the district navigates a new literacy curriculum, budget pressures and questions about student mental health. Heather von Mering and John Bellaire are competing for an open seat on the School Committee, which oversees a budget von

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FEATURES

'Chicago: Teen Edition' dances onto the Winchester High School stage

By Talia Ho | Correspondent Fame. Fortune. And all that jazz. This spring, Winchester High School presents "Chicago: Teen Edition," a bold musical that explores celebrity culture, media manipulation, and the cost of ambition. Set in the 1920s, this iconic production is sure to leave the audience wanting more. Performances will

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Ripley Chapel in Winchester presents 'Syldason: You Are Welcome Here'

The following was submitted by the Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church: On Friday, March 13, beginning at 7:30 p.m., live in-person and live streamed from the stunning Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church, Winchester, 21 Church St., join in with Syldason, a duo concert featuring Sylvie Zakarian,

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NEWS

Rep. Michael Day helps House colleagues pass sweeping energy affordability bill

The following was submitted by the Office of Rep. Michael S. Day: Rep. Michael S. Day and his colleagues in the House of Representatives recently passed energy affordability legislation that would result in over $9 billion in savings for utility ratepayers over the next 10 years. The bill maintains critical

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